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The Forests of Alaska.

John Muir

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crease of forest area are on the contrary not a debt, but capital well invested. From such a policy you may expect not only the most perfect protection, but in the end a considerable and from year to year increasing income.

In regard to the comparative amounts expended in Switzerland for corrective works and afforestation, it must be remarked that if the outlay has not hitherto accomplished its purpose the authorities should not be held responsible. Assistance is forthcoming whenever it is sought, and wherever forestation is indicated the necessity of undertaking it is invariably recommended, but I could give you countless examples of communities and corporations to whom the matter of subduing a torrent is a vital issue, who obstinately refuse to resort to cultures on their own ground and property, notwithstanding that most liberal appropriations are available for defraying the expenses.

The cause of the evil lies in the insufficient enlightenment of the people as to the real interests of the country. It seems, therefore, an important and worthy undertaking for the Bern Forestry Society to start a propaganda for the forestation of the collecting areas of our torrents, and for each member in his own neighborhood to work for the accomplishment of this object.

NOTE.—Appropriate resolutions closed Dr. Frankhauser's able and inspiring address.—ED.

The axe of the woodman is to find profitable employment in the forests of Labrador. A party of prospectors and timber lookers returned to Halifax recently and gave glowing accounts of the forest resources of that country. It appears that they had also looked over the forests of Newfoundland quite thoroughly, but found nothing there to equal what they had seen farther north. Plans have been perfected for organizing an extensive lumbering operation, and the projectors believe they will be in shape to begin shipping lumber next spring. Very naturally the market for their stock will be found in England, for there is no other consuming point where the product could be handled at a profit under existing conditions.

The Forests of Alaska.

BY JOHN MUIR, IN THE *Century* FOR JULY.

Going into the woods almost anywhere, you have first to force a way through an outer tangle of *Rubus*, huckleberry, dogwood and elder-bushes, and a strange woody plant about six feet high, with limber, rope-like stems beset with thorns, and a head of broad, translucent leaves like the crown of a palm. This is the *Ecino panax horrida*, or devil's club. It is used by the Indians for thrashing witches, and, I fear, deserves both of its bad names. Back in the shady depths of the forest the walking is comparatively free, and you will be charmed with the majestic beauty and grandeur of the trees, as well as with the solemn stillness and the beauty of the elastic carpet of golden mosses flecked and barred with the sunbeams that sift through the leafy ceiling.

The bulk of the forests of southeastern Alaska is made up of three species of conifers—the Menzies and Merten spruces and the yellow cedar. These trees cover nearly every rod of the thousand islands, and the coast and the slopes of the mountains of the mainland to a height of about 2,000 feet above the sea.

The Menzies spruce, or Sitka pine (*Picea sitchensis*), is the commonest species. In the heaviest portions of the forest it grows to a height of 175 feet or more, with a diameter of from three to six feet, and in habit and general appearance resembles the Douglas spruce so abundant about Puget Sound. The timber is tough, close-grained, white, and looks like pine. A specimen that I examined back of Fort Urangel was a little over six feet in diameter inside the bark four feet above the ground, and at the time it was felled was about 500 years old. Another specimen, four feet in diameter, was 385 years old; and a third, a little less than five feet thick, has attained the good old age of 764 years without showing any trace of decay. I saw a raft of this spruce that had been brought to Urangel from one of the neighboring islands, three of the logs of which were one hundred feet in length, and nearly two feet in diameter at the small ends. Perhaps half of the trees in Southeastern Alaska are of this species. Menzies, whose name is associated with this grand tree, was a Scotch botanist, who accompanied Vancouver in his voyage of discovery to this coast a hundred years ago. The beautiful hemlock-spruce (*Isuga Mertensiana*) is more slender than its companion, but nearly as tall, and the young trees are more graceful and picturesque in habit. Large numbers of this species used to be cut down by the Indians for the astringent bark, which they pounded into meal for bread to be eaten with oily fish.

The third species of this notable group, *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*, called yellow cedar or Alaska cedar, attains a height of 150 feet and a diameter of from three to five feet. The branches are pinnate, drooping, and form beautiful light-green sprays like those of *Libocedrus*, but the foliage is finer and the plumes are more delicate. The wood of this noble tree is the best the

country affords and one of the most valuable of the entire Pacific Coast. It is pale yellow, close-grained, tough, durable, and takes a fine polish. The Indians make their paddles and totem poles out of it, and weave matting and coarse cloth from the inner bark. It is also the favorite firewood. A yellow-cedar fire is worth going a long way to see. The flames rush up in a multitude of quivering, jagged edged lances, displaying admirable enthusiasm, while the burning surfaces of the wood snap and crackle and explode and throw off showers of coals with such noise that conversation at such firesides is well-nigh impossible.

The durability of this timber is forcibly illustrated by fallen trunks that are perfectly sound after lying in the damp woods for centuries. Soon after these trees fall they are overgrown with moss, in which seeds lodge and germinate and grow up into vigorous saplings, which stand in a row on the backs of their dead ancestors. Of this company of young trees perhaps three or four will grow to full stature, sending down straddling roots on each side, and establishing themselves in the soil; and after they have reached an age of two or three hundred years, the downtrodden trunk in which they are standing, when cut into, is found as fresh in the heart as when it fell.

The species is found as far south as Oregon, and is sparsely distributed along the coast and through the islands as far north as Chilcot (lat. 59°). The most noteworthy of the other trees found in the southern portions of these forests, but forming only a small portion of the whole, is the giant arbor vitæ (*Thuja gigantea*). It is distributed all the way up the coast from California to about lat. 56°. It is from this tree that the Indians make their best canoes, some of them being large enough to carry fifty or sixty men. Of pine I have seen only one species (*P. contorta*), a few specimens of which, about fifty feet high, may be found on the margins of lakes and bogs. In the interior beyond the mountains it forms extensive forests. So also does *Picea alba*, a slender tree, which attains a height of one hundred feet or more. I saw this species growing bravely on frozen ground on the banks of streams that flow into Kotzebue Sound, forming there the margin of the arctic forest.

In the cove cañons and fiords, and along the banks of the glaciers, a species of silver fir and the beautiful Paton spruce abound. The only hard wood trees I have found in Alaska are birch, alder, maple, and wild apple, one species of each. They grow mostly about the margins of the main forests and back in the mountain cañons. The lively yellow-green of the birch gives pleasing variety to the colors of the conifers, especially on slopes of river-cañons with a southern exposure. In general views all the coast forests look dark in the middle ground and blue in the distance, while the foreground shows a rich series of grey and brown and yellow trees. In great part these colors are due to lichens which hang in long tresses from the branches, and to mosses which grow in broad, nest-like

beds on the horizontal palmate branches of the Menzies and Merten spruces. Upon these moss-bed gardens high in the air ferns and grasses grow luxuriantly, and even seedling trees five or six feet in height, presenting the curious spectacle of old, venerable trees holding hundreds of their children in their arms.

Seward expected Alaska to become the shipyard of the world, and so perhaps it may. In the meantime, as good or better timber for every use still abounds in California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia; and let us hope that under better management the waste and destruction that have hitherto prevailed in our forests will cease, and the time be long before our Northern reserves need to be touched. In the hands of nature these Alaska tribes of conifers are increasing from century to century as the glaciers are withdrawn. May they be saved until wanted for worthy use—so worthy that we may imagine the trees themselves willing to come down the mountains to their fate!

American Forestry Association.

DESIGNS FOR A CORPORATE SEAL.

The American Forestry Association invites competitive designs for a corporate seal.

All designs submitted will be referred to a jury, composed as follows, viz. :

Albert Pissis, San Francisco; Henry Van Brunt, Kansas City; Halsey B. Ives, St. Louis; J. H. Guest, Cincinnati; Augustus St. Gaudens, New York City.

If any one of these gentlemen finds himself unable to act, his place will be filled by some other expert.

The seal will not be more than one and three-quarters ($1\frac{3}{4}$) inches in diameter.

The words American Forestry Association will appear upon the seal.

Drawings will be not more than four (4) inches in diameter, rendered in India ink, on sheets twelve (12) inches square, without frame or border.

Each design will be marked in the lower right hand corner of the sheet with some distinctive device, and will be accompanied by a sealed envelope, marked with the same device, and containing the name and address of the author.

Designs will be forwarded, prepaid, to the Secretary of the American Forestry Association, Washington, D. C., so as to reach their destination not later than January 15, 1898, at twelve o'clock noon. From Washington the drawings will be